

George Mason, April 23, 1769, Virginia Merchants Association, Plan for Non-Importation of British Goods, Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers. Published by the Society of the Colonial Dames of America. Edited by Stanislaus Murray Hamilton.

Old Papers Respecting the Non-importation of British Goods

1767 & 1774¹

The Merchants, Traders, Gentlemen, and other principal Inhabitants of the Colony of Virginia in general & of the County ofin particular, deeply affected with the Grievances and Distresses with which his Majesty's American Subjects are oppressed, and dreading the evils which threaten the Ruin of themselves and their posterity, by reducing them from a free and happy people to a Wretched & miserable State of Slavery, having taken into their Serious Consideration the present State of the Trade of this Colony, and of the American Commerce in general, observe with anxiety that the Debt due to Great Britain for Goods imported from thence is very great, and the means of paying this Debt in the present Situation of affairs likely to become more and more precarious — that the Difficulties under which they now labour as a Trading people are owing to the Restrictions prohibitions, & ill advised Regulations in several late Acts of parliament in Great Britain; in particular that the last unconstitutional Acts imposing Duties on Tea, Paper, Glass &c. for the sole purpose of raising a Revenue in America, being injurious to property, & destructive to Liberty, have a necessary Tendency to prevent the payment of Old Debts or the Contracting of New, and are of Consequence ruinous to Trade — That notwithstanding the many earnest applications already made there is little reason to expect a Redress

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of these Grievances. — Therefore in justice to themselves & their posterity, as well as to the Traders of Great Britain concern'd in the American Commerce, the Subscribers have Voluntarily & Unanimously entered into the following Resolutions, in Hopes that their Example will Stimulate the good people of this Colony to be frugal in the Use & Consumption of British Manufacture, and that their Brethern the Merchants & Manufacturers of Great Britain may from motives of Interest justice, & Friendship be engaged to exert themselves to obtain Redress of those Grievances under which the Trade & inhabitants of America at present Labour. —

First It is unanimously agreed on & resolved thisDay of 1769. That the Subscribers as well by their own Example as by all other legal ways & means in their power, will promote & encourage Industry & Frugality & discourage all manner of Luxury & Extravagance. —

Secondly That they will not at any time hereafter directly or indirectly import or cause to be imported any Manner of Goods Merchandize or Manufactures which are or shall hereafter be taxed by Act of Parliament for the purpose of raising a Revenue in America (except such only as orders have been already sent for) nor purchase any such after the first Day of September next of any person Whatsoever — But that they will always consider such Taxation in every Respect as an absolute prohibition, and in all future Orders direct their correspondents to ship them no Goods whatever taxed as aforesaid. —

Thirdly That the Subscribers will not hereafter directly nor indirectly import or cause to be imported from Great Britain or any part of Europe (except such Articles of the produce or manufacture of Ireland as are brought hither immediately from thence, & Fruit & Oyl immediately from the Mediteranean & except also such Goods as orders have been already sent for) any of the Goods here in after enumerated vizt. Spirits, Wine, Cyder, perry, Beer, Ale, Malt, Barley, peas, Beef, Pork, Fish, Butter, Cheese, Tallow, Candles, Oyl, Fruit, Sugar pickles, Confectionry, Pewter, Hoes, Axes, Watches, Clocks, Tables, Chairs, Looking-glasses, Carriages, Joiners & Cabinet Work of all Sorts, & Upholstery of all Sorts, Trinkets & Jewellery, plate, & Gold & Silver Smiths Work of all Sorts, Ribbons & Millenary

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of all sorts, Lace of all sorts India Goods of all Sorts (except Spices) Silks of all Sorts (except Sewing Silk) Cambricks, Lawn, Muslin, Gauze except Boulting Cloths Callico or Cotton Stuffs of more than 2/ pr. yd. Linnens at more than 2/ pr. yd. Woolen Worsted & Mix'd Stuffs of all sorts at more than 1/6 pr. yd. Broad Cloaths of all kinds at more than 8/ pr. yd. Narrow Cloaths of all kinds at more than 3/ pr. yd. Nets, Stockings, Shoes, & Boots, Saddles, & all Manufactures of Leather & Skins of all kinds until the late Acts of parliament imposing Duties of Tea, paper, Glass &c. for the purpose of raising a Revenue in America are repealed; and that they will not after the first of September next purchase any of the above enumerated goods of any person whatever, unless the above mentioned Acts of parliament are repealed —

Fourthly That in all orders which any of the Subscribers may hereafter send to Great Britain they shall & will expressly direct their correspondents not to Ship them any of the above enumerated goods, untill the bfore mentioned Acts of parliament are repealed; and if any Goods are ship'd them contrary to the tenor of this Agreement, they will refuse to take the same, or make themselves chargible therewith. —

Fifthly That they will not import any Slaves, or purchase any hereafter imported Slaves untill the said Acts of parliament are repeale'd. —

Sixthly That if the Measures already entered into shoud prove ineffectual, & our Grievances & oppressions shoud notwithstanding be continue'd; then & in that case, the Subscribers will put a stop to their exports to Europe of Tar, pitch, Turpentine, Timber, & Lumber, & Skins and Furs of all sorts, and will endeavour to find some other Employment for their Slaves and other Hands than cultivating Tobacco, which they will entirely leave off making, & will enter into such Regulations as may be necessary with Regard to Rents & other Tobacco Debts. —

Seventhy & Lastly That these Resolves shall be binding on all & each of the Subscribers, who do hereby each and every person for himself upon his Word & Honour agree, that

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he will strictly & firmly adhere to & abide by every Article of this Agreement from the time of his signing the same for & during the continuance of the before mentioned Acts of parliament; or untill a general Meeting of the Subscribers, after one Months public Notice, shall determine otherwise; the second Article of this Agreement still, & forever continuing in full power & Force² —

PHILADA 15th March 1769

GENTLEMEN

We need not remind you of the Acts of Parliament lately passed for raising a Revenue in America whereby the Liberty, Property and Trade of the Colonies are greatly Affected. We are sorry to inform you that from the latest accounts received from England there are little hopes of a repeal of those Acts notwithstanding the earnest applications that have been made for that purpose.

The Merchants and Traders of this City after mature deliberation, apprehending there is no way so effectual to obtain redress, as declining the importation of Goods from Great Britain untill the Acts are repealed, have entered into an Agreement for that purpose, a copy of which we enclose you. By this means, it is hoped that, the Traders and Manufacturers of Great Britain may be engaged to exert themselves in our favour. Experience has evinced the good effects of this measure in the case of the Stamp Act.

As it is of great importance that America should appear United and indeed as the good effects of this measure will depend upon such an Union, we are desirous to apply to you and hope we need not use any Arguments to induce you to pursue a Similar Plan. It may appear hard upon individuals to give up their Trade and the present prospect of gain; but by those who have a just sense of Liberty and love for their Country, no Sacrifice of that sort can be deemed great when those come in Competition.

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We would just observe, that though the Merchants and Traders here have entered into this Agreement without any Condition, yet many will be very uneasy under it, if you do not come into the like.

As the Agreement now sent you is not intended to be put in the Public Papers, we hope you will be careful in that respect. We shall be glad to hear from you as soon as Possible and are

Gentn. Your assured Friends JOHN REVNELL WILLM. FISHER SAML. HOWELL
ABEL JAMES To MESSRS. CHARS. WALLACE & CO JAMES DICK & STEWART
WILLIAM STEWART NICHES. MACCUBBIN Your very humble Servants WM. WEST
CHAS. THOMPSON JAMES MEASE THOMAS MIFFLIN J. M. NESBIT DANL. BENEZET
ALEXR. HUSTON JOHN GIBSON TENCH FRANCIS ROBT. MORRIS

Agreement of the Merchants of Philadelphia Entered into the 6th. February 1769 —

That no orders shall be sent to Great Britain by any Vessel or Way whatever for any line of Goods before the 10th. of March next —.

That all those who have sent forward any Orders for any Goods shall by the first Vessel to Sail send positive Orders to countermand them unless they are Ship'd before the first of April next; that if in consequence of any Orders already sent, any Goods are Ship'd after the first of April, or if any Goods are sent by any Person to Us to be sold on Commission they shall be put into the hands of a Committee to be chosen by the Merchants or shall either Store or dispose of them as they shall think proper, Provided always that the Goods shall not be delivered to the Person to whom they belong or to whom they are sent, untill advice is received that the late Revenue Acts against America are Repealed.

The following Agreement was entered into by the Merchants of Philadelphia the 10th. March 1769.

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The Merchants and Traders of the City of Philadelphia having taken into their serious consideration the present State of the Trade of this Province and of the American Commerce in general observe with Anxiety That the Debt due to Great Britain for Goods imported from thence is very great and the means of paying this Debt in the present situation of Affairs likely to become more and more precarious. That the difficulties under which they now labour as a Trading People are owing to the Restrictions, Prohibitions and ill advised Regulations in several late Acts of the Parliament of Great Britain in particular that the last unconstitutional Acts imposing Duties on Tea, Paper, Glass &c for the Sole purpose of raising a Revenue being injurious to Property and destructive to Liberty have a necessary Tendency to prevent the payment of old Debts or the contracting of New; & are of consequence ruinous to Trade. That notwithstanding the many earnest Applications already made there is little reason to expect a Redress of these Grievances. Therefore in Justice to themselves and their Posterity as well as to the Traders of Great Britain concerned in the American Commerce they have Voluntarily and Unanimously entered into the following Resolutions in hopes that their Example will Stimulate the Good People of this Province to be frugal in the Use & Consumption of British Manufacture and that their Brethren the Merchants and Manufacturers of Great Britain may from Motives of Friendship and Interest be engaged to exert themselves to obtain Redress of those Grievances under which the Trade and Inhabitants of America at present labour.

First Confirming the Agreement entered into the sixth of February last it is unanimously Resolved and Agreed. That the Subscribers will neither directly nor indirectly import from Great Britain nor any other part of Europe (except Linens & Provisions from Ireland immediately) any kind of Goods Ship'd after the first of April next except the following Articles, Tin Plates, Wire, Powder, Shot, Lead, Sail Cloth, Wool Combs, Wool & Tow Cards, Sheerman Sheers Drugs Medicines, Dye Stuff, Salt, Coal, Brimstone, School Books, Sugar Moulds, Chalk and Whiting untill the late Acts imposing Duties on Tea, Glass &c for the purpose of raising a Revenue are repealed.

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Secondly That in all Orders which any of the Subscribers may send to Great Britain after the ninth instant for other Articles than those above enumerated they shall and will direct their Correspondents not to Ship them untill the above Acts are repealed.

Thirdly That if any Person, Strangers or others shall Contrary to the Tenor of this Agreement import any Goods the Subscribers will by all lawfull & prudent Measures discountenance such Persons and will not purchase any Goods so imported.

Fourthly That these Resolves shall be binding on all and each of the Subscribers who do hereby each and every Person for himself upon his Word & Honour agree that he will Strictly and firmly adhere to and abide by every Article of this Agreement from this time for and during the Continuance of the above mentioned Acts or untill a General Meeting of the Subscribers after three Days Public Notice shall determine otherwise.

ANNAPOLIS March 1769

GENTLEMEN

We are favor'd with a Letter from you of the 15th. Current directed to us, in behalf of the Merchants and Traders of this place inclosing a Copy of an Agreement entered into by the Merchants and Traders of your City respecting the non-importation of certain Goods from Great Britain untill the repeal of the several Acts of Parliament laying oppressive and unconstitutional taxes on the American Colonies. Truly Sensible of the expediency of the measures recommended by you, we immediately on receipt of your Letter procured a meeting of all the Gentlemen concern'd in Trade in this City, and they having considered the Matter so far as the time and circumstances would allow, have desired us to communicate their sentiments to you on that Subject.

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The Agreement entered into by you is approved of by the Merchants here and they have Unanimously resolved to pursue such a Plan, provided the importers of the Province in general or nearly so, can be brought into the like measure.

But the Importers of Goods in this City are so few in number when compared to those of the whole Province that it would be in vain for them to Attempt the putting such a Scheme in execution without a general Concurrence. To obtain which the Merchants here will exert themselves not only by shewing their readiness to enter into the proposed Measure, but by their communicating your Letter and forwarding therewith a Copy of your Agreement to the Principal Merchants throughout the Province. Which step at their last meeting they desired us to pursue with all convenient speed and is now in great forwardness.

You must no doubt be sensible from your knowledge of the different manner in which the Trade of this Province and Pensilvania is carried on, that such an Agreement as yours cannot be so readily entered into here as in your Province. The Importers in the one are chiefly if not wholly confined to the City of Philadelphia; but in Maryland the Merchants are Scattered all over the Province consequently their general Consent to any particular measure cannot be readily Obtained. However that Difficulty might be easily got over if the Importation of Goods was entirely confind to Merchants; But here every Gentleman and Planter Imports Goods more or less for their Family use by which means [I] may venture to say that not aboveof the Goods brought into this Province are imported by the Merchants & Traders. Such being the case not only the Consent of the Merchant importers is necessary, but that of all the Gentlemen & Planters who import Goods for their own use, otherwise the end proposed by the Agreement would be entirely defeated.

We must likewise observe that when the Agreement for not importing Goods is entered into here, many Articles must be added to those exceptions in yours which the circumstance of the Province will render absolutely necessary tho' they may not be so in Pensilvania.

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But we shall Write you more fully on this Subject when we receive Answers to the several Letters which we have sent out, and in the mean time have only to Assure you that we have no reason to doubt, but that the Scheme will meet universal Approbation We are

Gentn. Your mo: Obt Hble Servants JAMES DICK & STEWART NICHES. MACCUBBIN
CHARLES WALLACE WILLIAM STEWART

ANNAPOLIS March 25th. 1769

GENTLEMEN

Last Monday we received a letter from the merchants in Philadelphia, relative to an agreement they have entered into for the non importation of certain goods from Great Britain. —

Having communicated the Same to the Merchants here they have directed us to transmit a Copy thereof to you together with a Copy of said agreement and a copy of our letter in answer thereto. All which we Submit to your Consideration and that of the other Merchants and Importers to whom it is Convenient for you to communicate the same. And we beg your Opinion thereon when you have duly considered the matter and We are

RespectfullyGentlemen — Your mo hble Servts JAMES DICK & STEWART NICHES.
MACCUBBIN CHARLES WALLACE WILLIAM STEWART ³

WILLIAMSBURG, May 31, 1774. ⁴

GENTLEMEN,

Last *Sunday* Morning several Letters were received from *Boston*, *Philadelphia*, and *Maryland*, on the most interesting and important Subject of *American* Grievances. The Inhabitants of *Boston* seem to be in a most piteous and melancholy Situation, and are

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doubtful whether they will be able to sustain the impending Blow without the Assistance and Cooperation of the other Colonies. By the Resolutions of their Town Meeting, it appears to be their Opinion that the most effectual Assistance which can be given them by their Sister Colonies will arise from a general Association against Exports and Imports, of every Kind, to or from *Great Britain*. Upon Receipt of this important Intelligence, the Moderator judged it most prudent immediately to convene as many of the late Representatives as could be got together,⁵ and yesterday, at a Meeting of twenty five of the late Members, we took the Business under our most serious Consideration. Most Gentlemen present seemed to think it absolutely necessary for us to enlarge our late Association, and that we ought to adopt the Scheme of Nonimportation to a very large Extent; but we were divided in our Opinions as to stopping our Exports. We could not, however, being so small a Proportion of the late Associates, presume to make any Alteration in the Terms of the general Association, and therefore resolved to invite all the Members of the late House of Burgesses to a general Meeting in this City on the first Day of *August* next. We fixed this distant Day in Hopes of accommodating the Meeting to every Gentleman's private Affairs, and that they might, in the mean Time, have an Opportunity of collecting the Sense of their respective Counties. The Inhabitants of the City were convened yesterday in the Afternoon, and most chearfully acceded to the Measures we had adopted.

We flatter ourselves it is unnecessary to multiply words to induce your Compliance with this Invitation, upon an Occasion which is, confessedly, of the most lasting Importance to all *America*. Things seem to be hurrying to an alarming Crisis, and demand the speedy, united Councils of all those who have a Regard for the common Cause. We are, Gentlemen, your most affectionate Friends, and obedient humble Servants,

PEYTON RANDOLPH, Moderator; ROBERT C. NICHOLAS, EDMUND PENDLETON, WILLIAM HARWOOD, RICHARD ADAMS, THOMAS WHITING, HENRY LEE, LEMUEL RIDDICK, THOMAS JEFFERSON, MANN PAGE, JUNIOR, CHARLES CHARTER,

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LANCASTER, JAMES MERCER, ROBERT WORMELEY CARTER, GEORGE WASHINGTON, FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT LEE, THOMAS NELSON, JUNIOR, ROBERT RUTHERFORD, JOHN WALKER, JAMES WOOD, WILLIAM LANGHORNE, THOMAS BLACKBURNE, EDMUND BERKELEY, JOHN DONELSON, PAUL CARRINGTON, LEWIS BURWELL.

1 This is Washington's indorsement, written on a small slip attached to these papers.

2 This paper is Mason's original draft of the Association, which, with a few alterations and additions, was adopted unanimously by the Burgesses, at a private house in Williamsburg (Governor Botetourt having, in alarm, dissolved the Assembly), May 28, 1769, and sent, for the signatures of the people, throughout Virginia.

3 These letters and papers from Pennsylvania and Maryland Washington inclosed to George Mason, April 5, 1769, with an accompanying letter commending the "scheme," and asking Mason's opinion as to how and when it would be best to promote it in Virginia.

4 This is a broadside, and is one of the papers which Washington has fastened together and labeled "Old Papers Respecting Non-importation of British Goods."

5 The Governor had dissolved the Assembly on May 27.